Sheldon
Further Notes
on the Names of the
Letters

· LORRAINE ·
· EDWARD · WALTER ·
· πάντα · ρεῖ ·

· LORRAINE ·

EDWARD · WALTER

· ΠΑΝΤΑ · ῬΕΙ ·
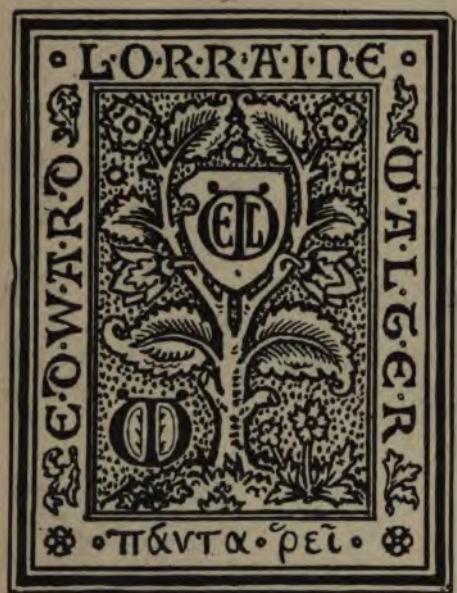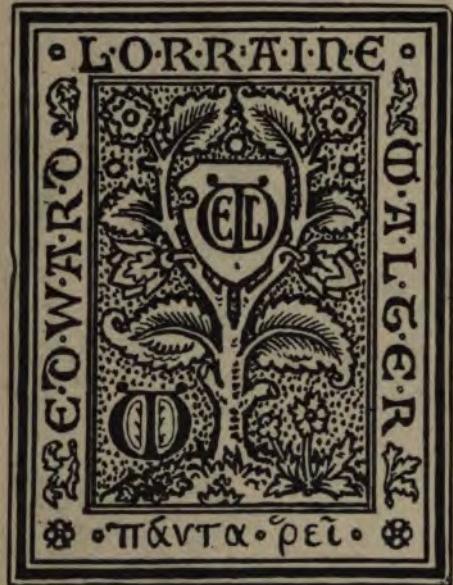
REPRINT.

STUDIES AND NOTES

IN

PHILOLOGY AND LITERATURE

VOL. II.

Edward Stevens Sheldon (handwritten signature)

FURTHER NOTES ON THE NAMES OF THE LETTERS.[1]

To the names of the letters given in these *Studies*, I, 67, may be added *kyuk* for *q*, communicated to me by Professor B. I. Wheeler, of Cornell University, who heard it repeatedly in the year 1877–78 from an Irish student in the Providence (Rhode Island) High School. By way of explanation of this form, I suggest that after the back and labial vowel *u* of *kyu* the easiest consonants to add are the labials (such as a form of *f* or a *p*, according as the lips are partly or wholly closed) and a back consonant, such as *k*, it being remembered that the back spirants are not familiar to English pronunciation. Possibly, the first step was to end the short and energetic *u* (not *ū*) with the glottal stop, which, I think, is not entirely unknown in some cases, at least in American pronunciation, and the sound of which is near enough to a faint *k* to suggest *k* to the ear. Professor Wheeler also suggests that in *e-by-itself-e* = *e-per-se-e* we may have a translation of Greek ψιλόν in ἒ ψιλόν, — a name introduced in mediæval times to distinguish ε from αι, which was then pronounced like ε.[2] It is not necessary to go to the Greek name for an explanation, for Latin *ae* early became identical in quality with the simple short *e*, and this change in pronunciation of the diphthong is perhaps older in Latin than in Greek. The Latin short *e* represented the open sound (French *è*), while the Greek ε stood for the close sound (French *é*), and it is probable that when Greek αι became a monophthong, it became at first an open *e*, as the Latin *ae* did, and therefore did not necessarily at once become confused with ε in quality. Compare the Gothic use of the letter *e* for the long, close sound, and of *ai* for the short, open sound (see

---

[1] See I, 66 ff. Much of this supplementary article was read in the Modern Language Conference of Harvard University, December 7, 1892.

[2] Cf. Blass, *Ueber die Aussprache des Griechischen*, 2. Aufl., pp. 17, 18, 21 ff., 44 ff., 54 ff.

Sievers, in Paul's *Grundriss der germ. Phil.*, I, 409, 410).[1] Of course, in both Latin and Greek, local usage may have varied, and the vulgar pronunciation may have disagreed in such points with that of more careful and refined speakers. As to the age of the Latin phrase *e per se* cf. also the passage quoted below (p. 161) from Terentius Scaurus, in which *d per se* is spoken of as standing for the syllable *de* in writing, because *de* was the name of the letter. This grammarian lived in the time of Hadrian.

It has not yet been possible for me to verify with certainty the vowel name *eiblsifei*, or *eiblsɔfei*, for *a*, but I have evidence for its approximate correctness besides my own memory and that of Mr. Grandgent, the director of modern language instruction in the Boston public schools. Mr. J. M. Webb, who brought the matter forward at the meeting of the Modern Language Association in Nashville in 1890, has written me that the pronunciation he used in his remarks at that meeting was his own, based on the spelling of Colonel Holt in the book mentioned in the *Proceedings* of the Association. The passage as quoted in his letter runs:[2] "When I learned my alphabet, my *Ableselfa* and Ampezant, I do not remember." Mr. Webb then adds that, after his remarks, Dr. Garland, Chancellor of Vanderbilt University, told him that he had heard that mode of spelling in his youth, and the name of *a* was pronounced "*ā-bĭs-sel-fā*" — a pronunciation which was confirmed by the spelling used in a newspaper clipping furnished by Professor Joynes. So, thinking more of the history of the word in its written form than of the phonetic questions involved, Mr. Webb used the spelling *abisselfa* when he wrote out his remarks for publication. We thus have the explanation of the spelling used in the *Proceedings* of the Association, where Mr. Webb's remarks are quoted. Unfortunately, it seems through some inadvertence to have crept into the passage quoted from Colonel Holt's book. Dr. Garland himself has kindly given me, through Professor Charles Forster Smith, of the same

---

[1] My attention was first directed to the Gothic use of *e* and *ai* as giving evidence for the close value of Greek ε in the time of Wulfila, by Professor Wheeler, in conversation a few years ago.

[2] The book is out of print, and I have not seen a copy. Mr. Webb quotes from p. 51.

University, further information, as follows : "When I was a boy at a country school in Nelson Co., Va., about 1820, we used the word *a-bis'-sil-fá*, with accents on the second and last syllables, and were taught that it came from abbreviating the sentence *A by itself A.* I also heard, but rarely, the vowel *e* used in a similar manner. My father also stated that a like pronunciation obtained in his school-boy days. He was born in 1777." The name *a-bisself-a*, with an accent on the *i* and not on the *e*, has also been mentioned to me by Professor J. M. Manly, of Brown University, who remembered hearing it from an older relative when he was a child in the South. Professor E. S. Joynes, of South Carolina College, writes me that his remembrance of the form spoken of at Nashville (of which he had at the time no personal recollection) is *á-bissèf-a*, with a secondary accent on *sef* (without any *l* sound), and no accent on *bis*, which was pronounced quickly, giving something almost like *á-bsèf-a.*

I am indebted to Colonel R. M. Johnston for information as to similar names once known in country schools in Middle Georgia, a region which was settled first, as he writes me, by Virginians and North Carolinians. These names had gone entirely out of vogue at the time of his own attendance at school, but he has heard old persons speak of the habit of country schoolmasters of requiring the vowels to be so called. "The pronunciation of (for instance) *a* was ábisslefá, one word of four syllables, a long, two shorts, and a long."

Perhaps in the New England form *e-myself-e* for earlier *ibiselfi*, the change of *b* to *m* is an instance of popular etymology, the unintelligible *biself* being changed to *myself.* The form *abisselfa*, with the accent on the *i*, is clearly due to a strong accent on the final *a*, on account of which the stress on the immediately preceding syllable was sooner or later lost entirely, while a secondary accent developed on the *i*, the natural place for a secondary accent to show itself. If a form like *eiblsifei* or *eiblsəfei* exists or ever did exist, a similar loss of the accent on the penult occurred while the first syllable retained a primary or secondary stress, and in view of the common pronunciation of *sef*[1] for *self* in the South, or some parts of the

---

[1] Cf., for example, the form in phonetic spelling, *widhisef* (= with hisself, himself), in *Dialect Notes,* published by the American Dialect Society, IV, 197.

South, and the form *ableselfa*, quoted from Colonel Holt, I think it probable that such a form did exist once, as it perhaps does still.

The name *ampezant*, occurring above in the same passage with *ableselfa*, is not the only evidence for a final *t* instead of the usual *d* of *ampersand*. Professor Joynes writes: "As to *ampersand*, my recollection is quite distinct. In my day — fifty years ago — the sign & always stood at the end of the alphabet, and we recited it as a letter: x, y, z, ampersand. Yet I think we called it rather ampersan*t* or ampersan*ts*, without the slightest idea (on the part of pupils or teacher) that it contained any trace of the word *and*. I was in childhood also familiar with the name *izzard*." Mr. George H. Browne of Cambridge informs me that he used to hear his grandfather (a native and resident of Framingham, Mass.) say the alphabet ending in *zed, ampsam*. Mr. Browne is not quite sure, at this distance of time, what the vowel of the second syllable was; that of the first was *æ*. Still another form is *eppershand*, given in Samuel Ramsey's *The English Language and English Grammar*, New York, 1892, p. 104,[1] and well explained as *et-per-se-and*.

For *izzard* I can now show a spelling *izzid*, which gives confirmation to the etymology I proposed, as it is a Scotch form, and therefore less likely than a Southern English one to have lost the *r*, if there was originally an *r* in the second syllable. It is found in William Bell Scott's *Autobiographical Notes*,[2] I, 29: "An uncle, the father's elder brother, became important. . . . He took some pains too to keep us right in pronouncing the alphabet, although he only excited our mirth when he went over the letters, giving them the broad old Scotch pronunciation. A was *awe*, B was *bay*, C was *say*, and so on, ending with U sounded like *oo* in good, W as *duploo*, Z as *izzid*. This pronunciation, which is that of Latin in all countries except England, was long before the day we speak of abandoned in the teaching of English in Edinburgh.'

---

[1] This reference was given me by Professor Kittredge several months ago. I cannot now find the book to verify it. There is popular etymology in the last syllable, or *sh*, if meaning ʒ, comes from *sy* for unstressed *se* before *a*.

[2] Autobiographical Notes of the Life of William Bell Scott, *H.* R.S.A., LL.D., and Notices of his Artistic and Poetic Circle of Friends, 1830 to 1882. Edited by W. Minto, London, 1892.

Scott was born in 1811, "at St. Leonard's, close to the old town of Edinburgh" (p. 7).

The name *edez* in the *Zeitschrift für neufranz. Sprache u. Lit.*, I, 16, may be, it is suggested by Professor Manly, a mistake not for *zedes* (or *zedez*) but for *ezed;* if so it is the earliest example yet found of this form. Compare the spelling *eyx* for the name of *x*, which is very likely a mistake for *yex* (= *yeus* or *yeux*, cf. Barcley and Palsgrave as cited by me in my former article, p. 70).

An English name for *z*, spelt *ze* or *zee*, seems to have been more or less in use in the seventeenth century, and this probably explains the name now common in America. In *The English Grammar, or The Institution of Letters, Syllables, and Words, in the English Tongue*, etc., by Charles Butler, Oxford, 1633, is given (p. 2) what the author calls "the triple alphabet" (Roman, italic and black-letter), with names placed over the letters. He uses a sort of reformed spelling (a barred *d* or *t* for *th*, according to the sound, a barred *c* for *ch*, and similarly other barred letters), gives two names each to *c* and *g*, calls *h he, j je, w we, y yi,*[1] and *z ze;* and one may suppose that these were merely individual attempts to reform the letter names,[2] much as Sir Thomas

---

[1] This name for *y* occurs also in *The Compleat English-Scholar, in Spelling, Reading, and Writing.* By E. Young. 6th ed. London, 1684. The name there given for *z* is *zed* (p. 3).

[2] Butler himself says (p. 9): "*Y* is bothe an English Consonant and a Greeke Vouel: the which is crept into our English words .... the force of the consonant is see'n in this word *yarn* or *yeere:* and therefore is it unrightly named *wi;* which hath in it the force of *w*, not *y*." And (p. 20): "*W* hath taken his name, not of his force, as other letters, but of his shape, which consisteth of 2 *U*'s: but the name dubble *U* helpeth not in spelling, because it sheweth not the force of the letter: which is plainly sounded in this name *Ew* or *We*." Writing of *z* (p. 20) he makes no mention of any other name; possibly *ze* was already in some use. (In these extracts Butler's peculiar letters are not reproduced.) As to the names of *j, v, w, y* the following extracts from Alex. Hume, *Of the Orthographie and Congruity of the Britan Tongue* (ed. H. B. Wheatley, London, 1865. Early Eng. Text Soc., 5), may be of interest: "I wald commend .... the symbols of j and v to the latin consonantes, and their names to be jod and vau; .... and the symbols y and w to our English soundes, and their names to be ye and we, or yod and wau" (p. 13); and: "I wald have them name w, not duble u nor v, singl u, as now they doe; but the last, vau or ve, and the first, wau or we; and j, for difference of the voual i, written with a long tail, I wald wish to [this word is printed

Smith gives *v* the name *ev* already mentioned, and attempts which never found more than individual acceptance in England. But even in this case it is at least conceivable that this reformed name for *z* was accepted by some few who brought it with them to America, where it afterwards acquired currency. Another such attempt to give *z* a new name is seen when it is called *ez* (cf. *es* for *s* and Smith's *ev* for *v*). This name, *ez*, occurs in *Logonomia Anglica. Quâ Gentis sermo faciliùs addiscitur. Conscripta ab Alexandro Gil, Paulinae Scholae Magistro Primario,* 2d ed., London, 1621. This author also has a reformed spelling with new types, and has such names as *he* for *h*, *we* for *w*, *ya* for *y*, besides *ez* for *z* (pp. 12, 13). More important, however, than these attempts is the fact that the name *zee* is given in another book not in reformed spelling, namely: *The Child's Delight. Together with an English Grammar.* By Tho. Lye, M.A. London, 1671. Lye adopts, it is true, some other reformed names, such as *hee* for *h*, *wee* for *w*, and for *y* he gives two names, one *wy*, the other *yeà*, the latter evidently for *y* used as a consonant (see p. 3 in his book), and indeed it is not strange that the names *he, we*, and a name beginning with the consonantal *y* for *y*, should have come into some use when they had once been proposed. The name of *h*, a very common letter, was too firmly fixed to be displaced, that of *w* was also too popular and too easily learned from the shape of the letter to be changed, in spite of its clumsiness, while *z* had no name so universally accepted (*zed* and *izzard* or some other form of this latter name being both in use) that a short, new name, according with the names of many other consonants, could not easily be adopted. As for *y*, its name was doubtless also much commoner than any one of the names for *z*. Moreover, the new names proposed for it varied, so that they, so to speak, killed each other's chances; *yi* was evidently a substitute for *wi*, while *yea* and *ya* were rival forms, with little to recommend

---

twice] be called jod or je " (p. 16). The date of this Scotch treatise is probably not far from the year 1617; see the editor's preface, p. v. For the time when the distinction of *i* and *j, u* and *v* was made see also Livet, *La Grammaire française et les Grammairiens du xvi*[e] *siècle,* p. 199, note 2. Here may be mentioned the names for consonants *eb, ed ... ev, ez*, etc., used by Sheridan in the Prosodial Grammar prefixed to his dictionary.

them. If, in the very few grammars and primers of the seventeenth century which I have been able to examine, I have found two cases which agree with the American name, I think it may be concluded that an examination of many such books (including those used as schoolbooks in America) would show several more, and that the name spelt *ze* or *zee* was really in some use in the schools in England in the seventeenth century. Whether any traces of it survived there later, perhaps even up to the present time, I cannot tell.

For the use of *k* in Latin spelling to express the syllable *ka (ca)*, and similarly of *c* for the syllable *ce*, *d* for *de*, *b* for *be*, I quote from Terentius Scaurus in Keil, *Gramm. Lat.*, VII, 14, 15, a passage which I found through Sittl's quotation of it in his *Die lokalen Verschieden-heiten der lateinischen Sprache*, p. 23 : "Hac [k] tamen antiqui in conexione syllabarum ibi tantum utebantur, ubi a littera subiungenda erat, quoniam multis vocalibus instantibus, quotiens id verbum scribendum erat, in quo retinere hae litterae nomen suum possent, singulae pro syllaba scribebantur, tanquam satis eam ipso nomine explerent, ut puta 'decimus,' d per se deinde cimus, item 'cera,' c simplex et ra, et 'bene,' b et ne. Ita et quotiens kanus et karus scribendum erat, quia singulis litteris primae syllabae notabantur, k prima ponebatur, quae suo nomine a continebat, quia, si c posuissent, cenus et cerus futurum erat, non canus et carus." Also cf. Sittl's note 24 on p. 24 of his book: "Ein Ueberrest dieser Schreibweise findet sich in den tironischen Noten, welche A nach K regelmässig auslassen." This passage from Terentius Scaurus does not decide the question of the vowel quantity in the Latin letter names (*c* for *cē* in *cera*, but *d* for *dĕ* in *decimus*, *b* for *bĕ* in *bene*). The practice which I supposed to be illustrated in the manuscript of the Provençal Boethius thus has a considerable antiquity. Although we do not know the date of the *antiqui* of whom Terentius Scaurus speaks, it must have been considerably before the time of Hadrian.

In the *Romania*, XXII, 148, foot-note 1, Gaston Paris says : "Je fais, d'après une tradition dont les origines remontent au latin même, les spirantes ou continues (*f, h, l, m, n, r, s*) du féminin, leur nom (*effe*, etc.) ayant une forme féminine, et cette distinction exprimant leur nature en regard des explosives (*b, c, d, g, p, t*). Mais les lettres nouvelles (*j, v*) ont détruit cet arrangement." This raises the

question whether the dissyllabic French names for *f, l,* etc., may not have come into use to mark the feminine gender. It is, however, not apparent why in Old French a noun ending in *f,* for example, could not be feminine, and if the Latin gender is continued, then why should' not the mutes, so called, be feminine also? For it is not the case, as a hasty reader might infer, that in Latin only the spirants or *semivocales* were feminine and the *mutae* were always masculine. The passage of Terentius Scaurus, quoted above, shows *k,* for example, as feminine. The Latin grammarians counted *h* as a "mute," and included *x* among the *semivocales.* For the spirants which Paris uses as feminine Littré gives the same gender when the names are *effe, ache, elle, emme, enne, erre, esse* (under the letters themselves he indicates the pronunciation without giving these spellings, but cf. *esse* in its alphabetical place), but he calls them masculine when the modern names *fe, he,* etc., are used, and in this latter case probably there is no disagreement in modern usage. But the name *esse* (or *es ?*) as masculine is illustrated by the title of Havet's paper reviewed by Paris (*Romania,* l. c.), which is "L'*s* latin caduc." This use of *esse* as masculine is apparently only comparatively recent. It is remarkable that the genders of the letter names do not agree in the different Romance languages, and even in the same language there is disagreement, at least in one case, that of modern Italian; cf. the genders as given by Petrocchi. In Spanish all these names are feminine, in Old Provençal both genders occur, at least for some names; cf., for *s* as masculine, Stengel, *Die beiden ältesten prov. Gramm.,* p. 6, lines 9, 22, the *Leys d'Amors,* ed. Gatien-Arnoult, II, 196 (*s* . . . cant totz sols es pauzatz), and, for *s* as feminine, *Leys,* I, 40 (cant *.s.* es pauzada); for *r* as feminine, *Leys,* I, 38 cant (*.r.* es pauzada); for *h* as masculine, *Leys,* I, 36 (can *.h.* es pauzatz); for *q* and *k* as feminine, *Leys,* I, 34 (que *.q.* ni *.k.* no sian trobadas); for *y* as masculine and feminine in the same line, *Leys,* I, 44 (De la natura de *.y.* grec. De *.y.* apelada fintz). Perhaps the feminine gender is due to the influence of the word *letra,* and a similar influence of *littera* in Latin may be assumed. For French it is conceivable that in distinguishing the spirants from the stops (or explosives), while speaking of them by their names, the *f* of original *ef,* for example, was naturally continued or lengthened, and the effect

of this may in Old French pronunciation have been near enough to *effe* or *efe*, with a whispered final *e*, to explain the origin of this Old French name, which then may have become feminine, it having the aspect of the commonest or typical feminines, and this gender being perhaps favored by the tradition of the Latin grammarians (not, it is true, confined to these letters). This is a somewhat artificial explanation, but we are dealing with words where artificial influence is to be expected. If either this explanation of the dissyllabic names or that which I suggested before is the correct one, then their feminine form may have preceded in French their use with the feminine gender.

Mr. Grandgent has kindly called my attention to a note by Louis Duvau in the *Mémoires de la Société de Linguistique de Paris*, VIII, 188, on the pronunciation of *y* in Latin. In this note reference is also made to an article by L. Havet containing a discussion of "la lettre *ui*" (in the same *Mémoires*, VI, 79 ff.). This latter article I unfortunately overlooked when I was preparing my former paper; as might be expected, it contains much that needs consideration. I likewise failed to see the brief report of a paper (mentioned by Havet) by C. B. Cayley on the name in English of the letter *y*, to be found in the *Proceedings* of the (London) Philological Society (Friday, May 4, 1883, p. xiv), but this report of the paper and of the discussion that followed contains little or nothing of value for the problem, the name *wi* or *wy* not being traced further back than the sixteenth century in England. If I quote a part of the passage in Baret's *Alvearie*, edition of 1573, there referred to, it is because his remarks serve as further evidence to show for the sixteenth century an inclination to connect the names of letters with their sounds: "Y Hath bene taken for a greeke vowel among our latin Grammarians a great while, which me thinke if we marke well we shall finde to be rather a diphthong: for it appeareth to be compounded of u and i. which both spelled togither soundeth as we write Wy. And therefore the Grekes haue one character υ called diphthongus impropria, where the little pricke vnderneath standeth for iota, and being handsomely fashioned is plainely our Romane or Italian Y. y. But if i vowell & a spell ya, what should we neede any y. This name also of y sheweth that w is but a superfluous

letter, seing that single u & i haue alwaies spelled y, and that of so
long continuance.   And as for x me thinke they might as well say
that & and 2 are letters as it is.   For suerly eche of them seemeth
to be a syllable rather then a single letter, and euery one of them
to be compacted of diuers and sundry letters."   I have not seen the
passage in Bullokar referred to in the same *Proceedings*.

Havet's note on the letter *ui* (that is, *y*) contains further evidence
for the French form *gui* as name of *y*, which he finds used as a long
syllable in a Latin verse, "de Téulf, moine de Saint-Maur-les-Fossés,
publié par H. Omont, *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de Paris et
de l'Île-de-France*, 1880, p. 169, d'après un manuscrit du commence-
ment du x111ᵉ siècle."   The word *gui* was, there, borrowed from
French into Latin, or at least from late vulgar Latin, for, as Havet
says, its *g* "est de date romane."   As to the name *ui* itself, Havet
says (p. 79): "Ce nom *ȣ* [of the Greek vowel *υ*] devait se confondre
[in Romance pronunciation] avec celui de l'*i*.   On a remédié à cette
confusion de deux façons.   Le procédé français contemporain con-
siste à distinguer l'*i* tout court et l'*i* grec.   Un procédé probablement
plus ancien, et qui rappelle l'expédient inventé pour la lettre *h* [he
does not give any etymology for the vulgar Latin *acca*], a consisté
à donner à la voyelle *y* un nom nouveau, *ui*.   L'origine de ce nom
semble transparente : un Y est un V joint à un I.   C'est ce nom
qui persiste aujourd'hui en Angleterre, où l'*y* s'appelle *wy*."

Now, a Latin name *ui*, formed as here suggested, may have existed,
but it is not clear how, without foreign influence, it could ever have
given French *gui* or *wi*, the latter of which forms presumably existed
in the French dialects which kept *w* for Teutonic *w*.   As the Latin
initial *u consonans* regularly gave *v* in French, where no Germanic
influence interfered, and as the Latin diphthong *ui* (in *cui*, or, in
vulgar Latin, *illui*) gave the French diphthong *üi*, which in English
gives *yu*, not *wi*, we appear to be driven to *ui* in two syllables as
the original Latin pronunciation of this assumed name.   If in dissyl-
labic *ui* the accent was on *u*, the result would almost certainly have
been in French the diphthong *üi*, or possibly *ü*, but not *gui* or *wi*.   A
dissyllabic word *ui* is something entirely without a parallel in Latin,
and therefore it is not certain what it would have given in French,
but I see no impossibility in its giving in the vulgar Latin of Gaul

a monosyllabic *ui* with *u* pronounced as Germanic initial *u* was
pronounced in vulgar Latin in words from a Germanic dialect or
influenced by such words.[1] Just as I have assumed vulgar Latin
haa and *uaa* from the combination of two letter names *ha* and *aa*, so
either *ua* or *ua* might be assumed from the combination of the vowel
names *u* and *i*.

I must here take up also the remarks of Duvau referred to above
(*Mém. de la Soc. de Ling.*, VIII, 188, 189). He calls attention to the
fact that "l'*u* est souvent noté par le groupe *ui* dans les manuscrits
latins," and that "les transcriptions grecques de mots latins rendent
quelquefois inversement le groupe *qui* par KY," and then adds:
"L'emploi tout particulièrement fréquent de *ui* pour *v* et inversement
après la gutturale semble indiquer que pour les Latins, la prononcia-
tion admise (nous ne disons pas la prononciation usuelle) de l'*y* se
rapprochait sensiblement de celle de *ui* dans le groupe *qui*: autrement
dit, elle se rapprochait de la prononciation de *ui* là où le premier
élément de ce groupe avait conservé son ancienne valeur de semi-
voyelle (*qui* étant resté *kui*, mais *uiuere* étant devenu *vivere*). Les
transformations phonétiques qu'a subies le nom de cette lettre . . .
indiquent qu'il remonte à une époque ancienne: il n'est pas impos-
sible que, dans les écoles, on ait adopté pour ce son étranger la
prononciation de *ui*, et que ce soit à cette prononciation que la lettre
doive son nom." An artificial influence of this kind I am quite
willing to admit as possible, but it must be remembered that the use
of *ui* for Greek *v* and *vice versa*[2] does not itself establish a Latin
name *ui* for the letter *y*, and the pronunciation of *qui* with con-
sonantal *u* instead of consonantal *u* (that is, *w*) may very well have
the intermediate stage before the pronunciation *ki* as in French was
reached.

It thus appears that a Latin name *ui* as the source, without foreign
influence, of the French *gui* is very doubtful, though we cannot prove
that no such Latin name existed.

---

[1] On the development of this sound from original Latin *v*, without foreign
influence, cf. Meyer-Lübke, *Gram. d. roman. Sprachen*, I, 340.

[2] Cf. Schuchardt, *Vokalismus des Vulgärlateins*, II, 272 ff., and Foerster's note
on v. 3025 of Chrétien's *Cligès*. Notice the pronunciation *kwi* in English *quinsy*,
quinsy, for which, it is true, the spelling may have been at least one cause; cf.
such English words as *equip*, besides some beginning with *qu*.

Havet says also, speaking of the Old French names of *y* (p. 80):
"Certains dialectes conservaient la vieille forme *ui*, sans *g*.   C'est
ce qu'indique clairement la *Senefiance de l'ABC* . . . :

> ' La maniere dirai du .Y.
> *Deus letres samble* au non .Y. ;
> Ceste letre ne fet que une.' "

To the second line of this quotation he adds the foot-note: "Le
sens et le vers indiquent de lire: *Deus letres samble au non .V. I.*"

This is not quite clear to me, for I can hardly believe that Havet
intended to say that there was an old French dissyllabic name *ui*,
especially as the first line he quotes shows that the name was mono-
syllabic and began with a consonant, and it seems unlikely that the
author of these verses intended to spell the name out with the two
letters *u* and *i* in the second line.   The only Old French forms of
the name in question that we can assume are *wi* and *gui*, and the
former of these we can only infer from the existence of *gui* and the
origin of this from older *wi*.   Either of these forms fits the verse
here in both lines, if we assume that *samble* in the second line counts
as two syllables in spite of the following vowel, and in view of the
occurrence of many such cases in Old French verse (see Tobler,
Vom französischen Versbau, 2. Aufl., pp. 56, 57), and, apparently, of
a similar one in this very poem,[1] the need of any change for metrical
reasons is not obvious.   But the form in this poem may very well
have been *gui* if this was by that time pronounced *gi* and not *gwi*
or *güi* (monosyllabic), that is, as the first syllable of *guider* is now
pronounced in French, and this was probably the case.   On this
pronunciation cf. G. Paris, *Extraits de la Chanson de Roland et de la
vie de Saint Louis*, 2d ed., p. 162, 43*, and Gröber's *Grundriss*, I,
586.   If our versifier used *gui* instead of *wi*, it probably had for him
but two sounds, *g* and *i*, and we thus have an explanation of his
speaking of the name as containing two letters, namely, that he was
thinking of the sounds of these two letters.   We need not assume
that he used the dialect form *wi*, for the analogy of *ache*, which he
uses instead of *ake*, for *h*, indicates that for *y* also he very likely

---

[1] Li .Z., une lettre au gieu.   Perhaps, if the verse above is to be corrected, it
should read thus : Deus letres samble au non li Y (cf. foot-note 1, p. 167).

used the common Central French name *gui*, and not *wi*, even if the
word existed with this latter form in his native dialect.[1]

After discussing the new letters and the name *wi* mentioned in
Gregory of Tours, Havet goes on : " Le nom *ui*, *wi* une fois con-
stitué, il pouvait paraître propre à désigner une lettre qui aurait eu
le son consonantique *w* [he has just been showing how the sign Δ,
for Chilperic's *uui*, may have come from the Greek letter Υ, assum-
ing that *uui* or *wi* was, when first coined, the name of *y*], comme
ka correspond au son *k*, *pe* au son *p*. Aussi une lettre *ui* (qu'il ne
faut pas confondre avec Υ) se montre-t-elle avec ce rôle nouveau en
terre scandinave. [Here he adds the foot-note : " Le *uui* de Chil-
péric était peut-être identique à cette consonne germanique, et non
à la voyelle Υ de l'alphabet latin."] Ce fait m'est obligeamment
signalé par M. de Saussure, qui le trouve, m'écrit-il, ' dans le traité
sur les lettres islandaises attribué à Thóroddr (vers 1150) et qui fait
partie de la Snorra-Edda.' " Here de Saussure gives Holtzmann's
translation (*Altdeutsche Grammatik*, p. 61) of the passage which
mentions the name *vi*,[2] and explains that the letter meant is really
" le signe Þ emprunté aux Anglo-saxons." He then goes on : " Si
chez les Scandinaves cette lettre n'était plus connue sous son vieux
nom germanique (anglo-saxon *wên*), c'est qu'elle avait cessé de faire
partie de leur alphabet runique et ne leur était revenue qu'avec
l'écriture latine. L'aspect du ÞÞ rappelait assez celui de l'*y* pour

---

[1] Dr. Marcou suggests another objection to Havet's view, namely, that *Y* in the
second line quoted is the subject of *samble* and is not in apposition with *non*. But
I do not feel sure that Havet did not understand the line in the same way, meaning
ui as the (singular) subject.

[2] In the original Icelandic the passage is as follows : "*y*, hann er grikkskr stafr,
ok heitir þar *vi*, en Latínumenn hafa hann fyrir *i*, ok í grikkskum orðum að eins
þó, ef skynsamliga er ritað ; ok þarf hann af því eigi hér í vára tungu, nema maðr
vili setja hann fyrir *v*, þá er hann verðr stafaðr við annan raddarstaf ok hafðr
fyrir samhljóðanda ; er þó láta ek af nú at rita hann, því at ek sékka *v* [*u*] þess
meiri þörf fulltings en öðrum raddarstöfum, þá er þeir verða fyrir samhljóðendr
settir." (Snorra Edda, II, 36.) A note in the edition a few lines before (p. 34)
explains that though the manuscript reading is *y*, it was a mistake for *v* [*u*
consonans], and that the form of the letter used, perhaps, came "ab litera anglo-
saxonica ÞÞ (i. e., *v*)." Further : "Ceterum notandum est, auctorem in sequenti-
bus confundere literam latinam *v*, quae consonans est, cum vocali graeca υ (lat. *y*),
tum ob figurae similitudinem, tum nominis (*ve*, *vi*)."

ⅎ

qu'on ait cherché à les mieux distinguer l'un de l'autre en mettant
sur le second un point diacritique (voir Gislason, *Um frum-parta*,
etc., p. 41). Cette ressemblance aura été pour quelque chose dans
le fait de la translation du nom de *ui* au p."

That the letter of which the Icelandic author speaks was bor-
rowed from the Anglo-Saxon is rendered at least highly probable by
his remarks near the beginning of his treatise ; and, if he borrowed
its shape, it is only a little less probable that he also took its name
from the same source. His words are : "En þó rita enskir menn
enskuna latínostöfum, öllum þeim er réttræðir verða í enskunni, en
þar er þeir vinnast eigi til, þá hafa þeir við aðra stafi, svá marga ok
þesskonar sem þarf, en hina taka þeir or, er eigi eru réttræðir í máli
þeirra. Nú eptir þeirra dæmum, allz vér erum einnar tungu, þó at
greinzt hafi mjök önnur tveggja eða nakkvat báðar, til þess að
hægra verði at rita ok lesa, sem nú tíðist ok á þessu landi . . . þá
hefir ek ok ritað oss I'slendingum stafrof, bæði latínostöfum, öllum
þeim, er mér þótti gegna til várs máls vel, svá at réttræðir mætti
verða, ok þeim öðrum, er mér þótti í þurfa at vera, en or váru teknir
þeir, er eigi gegna atkvæðum várrar tungu." (Snorra Edda, II, 12).

We, therefore, do not obtain from this source any clear evidence
that there was an old Scandinavian name *vi* (pronounced *wi*) for
the *w*-rune ; but it still seems to me most probable that in the sixth
century, or earlier, the name *uui* or *wi* was transferred, not from *y* to
the rune, but from the rune to *y*, and that Chilperic's sign, taken by
the copyist of Gregory of Tours as the Greek letter Δ, really was
originally nothing but the Teutonic rune for the *w* sound. Havet's
foot-note, quoted above, indicates that he is not disinclined to admit
this explanation, at least for the shape of Chilperic's letter. The
rune in question was not merely Anglo-Saxon, it was also Scandina-
vian and Old German, and, what is particularly interesting for us at
present, it was known and used, with other runic signs, in Burgundy
(see Sievers in Paul's *Grundriss der germ. Phil.*, I, 244, § 11, b,
and his table of *Runenalphabete*, col. ii, No. 8 ; also, R. Henning, *Die
deutschen Runendenkmäler*, pp. 47 ff., 152). The form of this rune
is that of a rude capital P made with only three straight lines
(Þ); and if the upright stroke is not carried down quite far enough,
we get at once a triangle, which explains the shape of the letter *uui*

in the manuscripts of Gregory of Tours;[1] and, as the runic letters were, or became, unknown among copyists in France, this modification was easy and almost inevitable, the Greek letters being more likely to be known. Havet's previous conjecture (l. c., p. 81) that the triangle for *uui* was the result of adding to V a horizoñtal bar, substituted for the "point supérieur que d'autres ont inventé pour distinguer l'Y de l'V," is, when this letter alone of Chilperic's is considered, much less likely, I think; but it does have support from the resemblance of one of Chilperic's other letters to a barred O, making the Greek letter Θ. It is by no means clear that the other two were formed in the same or an analogous way from E and T, as Havet suggests (p. 81), though his explanation of Ψ as coming from modified E is plausible; but it is, also, not certain that any of Chilperic's signs were, in the first place, simply Greek letters, as I had assumed from the fact that they are such in the manuscripts. It is not necessary to assume that all four are taken — with or without change — from any one alphabet — Latin, Greek, or runic; and if Δ for *uui* is a corruption of the runic letter for *w*, it does not follow that the other three must have had a runic origin also. Without denying the possibility of deriving the other three signs from runes, I am inclined to think the most probable, though still unproved, view is to consider, with Havet, Chilperic's Θ as a modification of Latin O, his Ψ as originally a modification of E, while his Δ stands for the *w* rune, and the fourth sign is left unexplained.[2]

The origin of the runic sign for *w* appears to be still uncertain, though it is doubtfully ascribed to the Latin *q*; see Sievers and Henning, as above. If there really was a Latin name *ui* for *y*, formed according to Havet's view from the shape of Y, then it is perhaps not impossible that this name led to a misconception of the not very common letter at the time when the runic letters were borrowed from the Latin alphabet, and that Y is thus really the source of the *w* rune. Its change of shape might then perhaps be explained by a desire to prevent confusion with other runes of similar

---

[1] I now find that this is not new; see Wimmer, *Die Runenschrift*, p. 72, n. 3, where, however, the reproduction of Chilperic's letters from the *Nouveau Traité de Diplomatique* is less exact than in his earlier Danish edition (1874).

[2] But see now the passage referred to in the preceding note.

shape (compare the runes for *f, p, z*).   But I attach little weight to
this conjecture, which, if correct, would make the history of the letter
y and its name most remarkable, as showing two mistakes the second
of which happened to correct the first.

It is also possible that the name *wi* was really an old Germanic
word, and not one first coined as a letter name, and that, besides
wén and *wyn*, this also came to be used as a name for the *w* rune.[1]
I will simply refer in this connection to Henning's discussion of *wi*
in *Die deutschen Runendenkmäler*, pp. 33 ff., 137.   The suggestion of
Celtic influence in producing an old Germanic name *wi* would
appear somewhat more probable if the possibility alluded to by
Sievers in speaking of the adaptation of the Latin letters to form
the runes should receive confirmation.   He says: " Möglicherweise
haben die Gallier eine Vermittlerrolle gespielt, aber zu erweisen ist
auch dies nicht."   (Paul's *Grundriss*, I, 247.)

As to the dot over the *y* in mediaeval writing, it seems to me quite
possible that it was used to distinguish *y* from the *w* rune, as de
Saussure suggests, and that the transfer of the name *wi* from that
rune to *y* was assisted by a confusion between the dotted *y* and the
rune, which indeed may even have been sometimes written by mistake
as an undotted *y*.[2]

In commenting on the quotation from the *Grammatica Aldi* I
mistakenly said that the words for *Z* were evidently misplaced.
Professor T. D. Seymour of Yale University has kindly pointed out
the true punctuation and the sense shown by the reading of the
genuine Aldine edition.[3]   The lines in question should run as
follows: " Quapropter . . . nunc in alphabeto etiam ea litera in
Gallia cisalpina filius dicitur, vulgo sic : fio, zeta ; pro y psilon vel y

---

[1] On the names *wén* and *wyn* of the *w* rune in Anglo-Saxon see also Gollancz,
Cynewulf's Christ, London, 1892, pp. 180–1, a passage to which Professor
Kittredge has called my attention.

[2] It is striking that the use of dots as diacritics appears in the later Scandinavian
runes, the same original sign being thus made to express different values.   This
use, however, seems not to begin till the end of the tenth century (see Paul's
Grundriss, I, 248, § 17).

[3] The edition I used appears to be that described in Brunet, *Manuel du Libraire*,
III, 1382.   A pencil note in the copy in the Harvard library refers to Brunet as
describing it.

graeca, zeta " ; and the meaning is that in repeating the alphabet the common usage was to say for the last letters " [x], fio, zeta," instead of saying " [x], y psilon (or Greek y), zeta."

Professor Collitz of Bryn Mawr College suggests that *acca* in late Latin stands for *hākā*, — the final vowels of the Latin letter names being probably long,[1] so that the names of *h* and *k* were *hā* and *kā*, — and that the change of *hākā* to *acca* is the result of compensation. He compares, among other analogous cases, the German *hatte* for older *hāte*, *mutter* for older *mūter*. He also raises the question whether the amalgamation of *ha* and *ka* into *haka*, *acca* may not have been the result, not of simple traditional running together of two names in consequence of misunderstanding, but of an intentional adding of the *ka*, *k* as a guttural having some resemblance to the *h* sound, to *ha* in order to distinguish the name of *h* from *a*, the first letter of the alphabet. This intentional addition of *ka* seems to me unlikely.

E. S. SHELDON.

Since the above pages were printed Holthausen's recently published explanation of the name *wi* has come to my notice ; see the *Zeitschrift für franz. Sprache u. Litt.*, XV, 172 (in the *Referate u. Rezensionen*). Very likely it is the correct one. A few words may be quoted here : "*wi* . . . kann ursprünglich nur das Y des gotischen Alphabets bezeichnet haben, von Wulfila zur Bezeichnung des spirantischen [here a foot-note] *w* gebraucht, weil es in der Lautverbindung αυ, ευ im Griech. des 4. Jahrh. diesen Wert besass. Sonst wurde es wie im Neugriech. mit Entrundung als *i* ausgesprochen, und daher mag das *i* im Namen des Buchstabens stammen, wenn man nicht vielleicht an die griech. Namen μῦ, νῦ (gespr. *mi, ni*), ξῖ, πῖ, φῖ, · χῖ, ψῖ erinnern darf. . . . Y hat im gotischen Alphabet selbst die doppelte Geltung als Spirans *w* und als Vokal *y*," etc.

The reference in the foot-notes, p. 169, is also due to Holthausen.

E. S. S.

---

[1] Besides the evidence I have already brought forward for long quantity in Latin *be, ce*, etc., the names of the Greek letters (*el* for ε, *oö* for ο, to say nothing of μῦ, νῦ, etc. ; see Blass, p. 17) may be mentioned.